The Abysmal Brute

By JACK LONDON

CHAPTER IX.

THE next afternoon she began work on an interview with Henry Addison that was destined never to be finished. It was in the private room that was accorded her at the Courier-Journal office that the thing happened.

She had paused in her writing to glance at a headline in the afternoon paper announcing that Glendon was matched with Tom Cannam when one of the doorboys brought in a card. It was Glendon's.

"Tell him I can't be seen," she told the boy.

In a minute he was back.

"He says he's coming in anyway, but he'd rather have your permission."

"Did you tell him I was busy?" she asked.

"Yes'm, but he said he was coming just the same."

She made no answer, and the boy, his eyes shining with admiration for the importunate visitor, rattled on.

"I know 'm. He's a awful big guy. If he started roughhousing he could

"You didn't," he retorted.

clean the whole office out. He's young Glendon, who won the fight last night."

"Very well, then. Bring him in. We don't want the office cleaned out, you know."

No greetings were exchanged when Glendon entered.

She was as cold and inhospitable as a gray day and neither invited him to a chair nor recognized him with her eyes, sitting half turned away from him at her desk and waiting for him to state his business.

He gave no sign of how this cavalier treatment affected him, but plunged directly into his subject.

"I want to talk to you," he said shortly. "That fight. It did end in that round."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I knew it would."

"You didn't," he retorted. "You didn't. I didn't."

She turned and looked at him with quiet affectation of boredom.

"What is the use?" she asked. "Prizefighting is prizefighting, and we all know what it means. The fight did end in the round I told you it would."

"It did," he agreed. "But you didn't know it would. In all the world you and I were at least two that knew Powers wouldn't be knocked out in the sixteenth."

She remained silent.

"I say you knew he wouldn't."

He spoke peremptorily and, when she still declined to speak, stepped nearer to her.

"Answer me," he commanded.

She nodded her head.

"But he was," she insisted.

"He wasn't. He wasn't knocked out at all. Do you get that? I am going to tell you about it and you are going to listen. I didn't lie to you. Do you get that? I didn't lie to you. I was a fool and they fooled me and you along with me.

"You thought you saw him knocked out. Yet the blow I struck was not heavy enough. It didn't hit him in the right place either. He made believe it did. He faked that knockout."

He paused and looked at her expectantly, and somehow, with a leap and thrill, she knew that she believed him, and she felt pervaded by a warm happiness at the reinstatement of this man who meant nothing to her and whom she had seen but twice in her life.

"Well?" he demanded, and she thrilled anew at the compellingness of him.

She stood up, and her hand went out to his.

"I believe you," she said. "And I am glad, most glad."

It was a longer grip than she had anticipated. He looked at her with eyes that burned and to which her own unconsciously answered back.

Never was there such a man, was her thought. Her eyes dropped first, and his followed, so that, as before, both gazed at the clasped hands.

He made a movement of his whole body toward her, impulsive and involuntary, as if to gather her to him, then checked himself abruptly with an unmistakable effort. She saw it and felt the pull of his hand as it started to draw her to him.

And to her amazement she felt the desire to yield, the desire almost overwhelmingly to be drawn into the strong circle of those arms. And had he compelled she knew that she would not have refrained.

She was almost dizzy when he checked himself and, with a closing of his fingers that half crushed hers, dropped her hand, almost flung it from him.

"God," he breathed; "you were made for me!"

He turned partly away from her, sweeping his hand to his forehead. She knew she would hate him forever if he dared one stammered word of apology or explanation.

But he seemed to have the way always of doing the right thing where she was concerned. She sank into her chair, and he into another, first drawing it around so as to face her across the corner of the desk.

"I spent last night in a Turkish bath," he said. "I sent for an old broken down bruiser. He was a friend of my father in the old days. I knew there couldn't be a thing about the ring he didn't know, and I made him talk.

"The funny thing was that it was all I could do to convince him that I didn't know the things I asked him about. He called me the babe in the woods. I guess he was right. I was raised in the woods, and woods is about all I know.

"Well, I received an education from that old man last night. The ring is rottener than you told me. It seems everybody connected with it is crooked. The very supervisors that grant the fight permits graft off of the promoters, and the promoters, managers and fighters graft off of each other and off the public.

"It's down to a system in one way, and, on the other hand, they're always—do you know what the double cross is?" She nodded. "Well, they don't seem to miss a chance to give each other the double cross.

"The stuff that old man told me took my breath away. And here I've been in the thick of it for several years and knew nothing of it. I was a real babe in the woods. And yet I can see how I've been fooled. I was so made that nobody could stop me. I was bound to win, and, thanks to Stubener, everything crooked was kept away from me.

"This morning I cornered Spider Walsh and made him talk. He was my first trainer, you know, and he followed Stubener's instructions. They kept me in ignorance. Besides, I didn't herd with the sporting crowd. I spent my time hunting and fishing and monkeying with cameras and such things.

"Do you know what Walsh and Stubener called me between themselves? The virgin. I only learned it this morning from Walsh, and it was like pulling teeth. And they were right. I was a little innocent lamb.

"And Stubener was using me for crookedness, too, only I didn't know it. I can look back now and see how it was worked. But you see, I wasn't interested enough in the game to be suspicious.

"I was born with a good body and a cool head. I was raised in the open, and I was taught by my father, who knew more about fighting than any man, living or dead. It was too easy. The ring didn't absorb me. There was never any doubt of the outcome. But I'm done with it now."

She pointed to the headline announcing his match with Tom Cannam.

"That's Stubener's work," he explained. "It was programmed months ago. But I don't care. I'm heading for the mountains. I've quit."

She glanced at the unfinished interview on the desk and sighed.

"How lordly men are," she said. "Masters of destiny. They do as they please"—

"From what I've heard," he interrupted, "you've done pretty much as you please. It's one of the things I like about you. And what has struck me hard from the first was the way you and I understand each other."

He broke off and looked at her with burning eyes.

"Well, the ring did one thing for me," he went on. "It made me acquainted with you. And when you find the one woman there's just one thing to do—take her in your two hands and don't let go. Come on, let us start for the mountains."

It had come with the suddenness of a thunderclap, and yet she felt that

"I don't dare," she said in a whisper.

she had been expecting it. Her heart was beating up and almost choking her in a strangely delicious way. Here at least was the primitive and the simple with a vengeance. Then, too, it seemed a dream. Such things did not take place in modern newspaper offices. Love could not be made in such fashion; it only so occurred on the stage and in novels.

He had arisen and was holding out both hands to her.

"I don't dare," she said in a whisper, half to herself. "I don't dare."

And therein she was stung by the quick contempt that flashed in his eyes but that swiftly changed to open incredulity.

"You'd dare anything you wanted," he was saying. "I know that. It's not a case of dare, but of want. Do you want?"

She had arisen and was now swaying as if in a dream. It flashed into her mind to wonder if it were hypnotism.

She wanted to glance about her at the familiar objects of the room in order to identify herself with reality, but she could not take her eyes from his. Nor did she speak.

He had stepped beside her. His hand was on her arm, and she leaned toward him involuntarily.

It was all part of the dream, and it was no longer hers to question anything. It was the great dare.

He was right. She could dare what she wanted, and she did want. He was helping her into her jacket. She was thrusting the hat pins through her hair.

And even as she realized it, she found herself walking beside him through the opened door.

The "Flight of the Duchess" and "The Statue and the Bust" darted through her mind. Then she remembered "Waring."

"'What's become of Waring?'" she murmured.

"'Land travel or sea faring?'" he murmured back.

And to her this kindred sufficient note was a vindication of her madness.

At the entrance of the building he raised his hand to call a taxi, but was stopped by her touch on his arm.

"Where are we going?" she breathed.

"To the ferry. We've just time to catch that Sacramento train."

"But I can't go this way," she protested. "I—I haven't even a change of handkerchiefs."

He held up his hand again before replying.

"You can shop in Sacramento. We'll get married there and catch the night overland north. I'll arrange everything by telegraph from the train."

As the cab drew to the curb she looked quickly about her at the familiar street and the familiar throng, then, with almost a flurry of alarm, into Glendon's face.

"I don't know a thing about you," she said.

"We know everything about each other," was his answer.

She felt the support and urge of his arms and lifted her foot to the step.

The next moment the door had closed, he was beside her and the cab was heading down Market street.

He passed his arm around her, drew her close and kissed her. When next she glimpsed his face she was certain that it was dyed with a faint blush.

"I—I've heard there was an art in kissing," he stammered. "I don't know anything about it myself, but I'll learn. You see, you're the first woman I ever kissed."

CHAPTER X.

WHERE a jagged peak of rock thrust above the vast virgin forest reclined a man and a woman. Beneath them, on the edge of the trees, were tethered two horses. Behind each saddle were a pair of small saddlebags.

The trees were monotonously huge. Towering hundreds of feet into the air, they ran from eight to ten and twelve feet in diameter. Many were much larger.

All morning they had toiled up the divide through this unbroken forest, and this peak of rock had been the first spot where they could get out of the forest in order to see the forest.

Beneath them and away, far as they could see, lay range upon range of haze empurpled mountains. There was no end to these ranges. They rose one behind another to the dim, distant skyline, where they faded away with a vague promise of unending extension beyond.

There were no clearings in the forest. North, south, east and west, untouched, unbroken, it covered the land with its mighty growth.

They lay, feasting their eyes on the sight, her hand clasped in one of his, for this was their honeymoon, and these were the redwoods of Mendocino.

Across from Shasta they had come, with horses and saddlebags, and down through the wilds of the coast counties, and they had no plan except to continue until some other plan entered their heads.

They were roughly dressed—she in travel stained khaki, he in overalls and woollen shirt. The latter was open at the sunburned neck, and in his hugeness he seemed a fit dweller among the forest giants, while for her, as a dweller with him, there were no signs of aught else but happiness.

"Well, Big Man," she said, propping herself up on an elbow to gaze at him, "it is more wonderful than you promised. And we are going through it together."

"And there's a lot of the rest of the world we'll go through together," he answered, shifting his position so as to get her hand in both of his.

"But not till we've finished with this," she urged. "I seem never to grow tired of the big woods—and of you."

He slid effortlessly into a sitting posture and gathered her into his arms.

"Oh, you lover!" she whispered. "And I had given up hope of finding such a one."

"And I never hoped at all. I must just have known all the time that I was going to find you. Glad?"

Her answer was a soft pressure where her hand rested on his neck, and for long minutes they looked out over the great woods and dreamed.

"You remember I told you how I ran away from the red haired schoolteacher? That was the first time I saw this country. I was on foot, but forty or fifty miles a day was play for me. I was a regular Indian.

"I wasn't thinking about you then. Game was pretty scarce in the redwoods, but there was plenty of fine

"It is more wonderful than you promised."

trout. That was when I camped on these rocks. I didn't dream that some day I'd be back with you—YOU!"

"And be a champion of the ring, too," she suggested.

"No; I didn't think about that at all. Dad had always told me I was going to be, and I took it for granted. You see, he was very wise. He was a great man."

"But he didn't see you leaving the ring."

"I don't know. He was so careful in hiding its crookedness from me that I think he feared it. I've told you about the contract with Stubener. Dad put in that clause about crookedness. The first crooked thing my manager did was to break the contract."

"And yet you are going to fight this Tom Cannam. Is it worth while?"

He looked at her quickly.

"Don't you want me to?"

"Dear lover, I want you to do whatever you want."

So she said and to herself, her words still ringing in her ears, she marveled that she, not least among the stubbornly independent of the breed of Sangster, should utter them.

Yet she knew they were true, and she was glad.

"It will be fun," he said.

"But I don't understand all the gleeful details."

"I haven't worked them out yet. You might help me. In the first place I'm going to double cross Stubener and the betting syndicate. It will be part of the joke. I am going to put Cannam out in the first round. For the first time I shall be really angry when I fight. Poor Tom Cannam, who's as crooked as the rest, will be the chief sacrifice.

"You see, I intend to make a speech in the ring. It's unusual, but it will be a success, for I am going to tell the audience all the inside workings of the game. It's a good game, too, but they're running it on business principles, and that's what spoils it. But there, I'm giving the speech to you instead of at the ring."

"I wish I could be there to hear," she said.

He looked at her and debated.

"I'd like to have you. But it's sure to be a rough time. There is no telling what may happen when I start my program. But I'll come straight to you as soon as it's over. And it will be the last appearance of young Glendon in the ring—in any ring."

"But, dear, you've never made a speech in your life," she objected. "You might fail."

He shook his head positively.

"I'm Irish," he announced. "And what Irishman was there who couldn't speak?"

He paused to laugh merrily.

"Stubener thinks I'm crazy. Says a man can't train on matrimony. A lot he knows about matrimony, or me, or you, or anything except real estate and fixed fights. But I'll show him that night, and poor Tom too. I really feel sorry for Tom."

"My dear abysmal brute is going to behave most abysmally and brutally, I fear," she murmured.

He laughed.

"I'm going to make a noble attempt at it. Positively my last appearance, you know. And then it will be you, YOU. But if you don't want that last appearance say the word."

"Of course I want it, Big Man. I want my Big Man for himself, and to be himself he must be himself. If you want this I want it for you and for myself too. Suppose I said I wanted to go on the stage or to the south seas or the north pole?"

He answered slowly, almost solemnly:

"Then I'd say go ahead. Because you are you and must be yourself and do whatever you want. I love you because you are you."

"And we're both a silly pair of lovers," she said when his embrace had relaxed.

"Isn't it great!" he cried.

He stood up, measured the sun with his eye and extended his hand out over the big woods that covered the serried, purple ranges.

"We've got to sleep out there somewhere. It's thirty miles to the nearest camp."

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Who of all the sports present will ever forget the memorable night at the Golden Gate arena when young Glendon put Tom Cannam to sleep and an even greater one than Tom Cannam, kept the great audience on the ragged edge of riot for an hour, caused the subsequent graft investigation of the supervisors and the indictments of the contractors and the building commissioners and pretty generally disrupted the whole fight game?

It was a complete surprise. Not even Stubener had the slightest apprehension of what was coming. It was true that his man had been insubordinate after the Nat Powers affair and had run off and got married. But all that was over.

Young Pat had done the expected—swallowed the inevitable crookedness of the ring and come back into it again.

The Golden Gate arena was new. This was its first fight, and it was the biggest building of the kind San Francisco had ever erected. It seated 25,000, and every seat was occupied.

Sports had traveled from all over the world to be present, and they had paid $50 for their ringside seats. The cheapest seat in the house had sold for $5.

The old familiar roar of applause went up when Billy Morgan, the veteran announcer, climbed through the ropes and bared his gray head.

As he opened his mouth to speak, a heavy crash came from a near section where several tiers of low seats had collapsed. The crowd broke into loud laughter and shouted jocular regrets and advice to the victims, none of whom had been hurt.

The crash of the seats and the hilarious uproar caused the captain of police in charge to look at one of his lieutenants and lift his brows in token that they would have their hands full and a lively night.

One by one, welcomed by uproarious applause, seven doughty old ring heroes climbed through the ropes to be introduced. They were all ex-heavyweight champions of the world.

Billy Morgan accompanied each presentation to the audience with an appropriate phrase. One was hailed as "Honest John" and "Old Reliable;" another was "the squarest two fisted fighter the ring ever saw."

And of others: "The hero of a hundred battles and never threw one and never laid down;" "the gamest of the old guard;" "the only one who ever came back;" "the greatest warrior of them all," and "the hardest nut in the ring to crack."

All this took time. A speech was insisted on from each of them, and they mumbled and muttered in reply with proud blushes and awkward shamblings.

The longest speech was from "Old Reliable" and lasted nearly a minute. Then they had to be photographed. The ring filled up with celebrities, with champion wrestlers, famous conditioners and veteran timekeepers and referees.

Lightweights and middleweights swarmed. Everybody seemed to be challenging everybody.

Nat Powers was there demanding a return match from young Glendon, and so were all the other shining lights whom Glendon had snuffed out.

Also they all challenged Jim Hanford, who, in turn, had to make his statement, which was to the effect that he would accord the next fight to the winner of the one that was about to take place. The audience immediately proceeded to name the winner, half of it wildly crying "Glendon" and the other half "Powers."

In the midst of the pandemonium another tier of seats went down, and half a dozen rows were on between cheated ticket holders and the stewards who had been reaping a fat harvest.

The captain dispatched a message to headquarters for additional police details.

The crowd was feeling good. When Cannam and Glendon made their ring entrances the arena resembled a national political convention. Each was cheered for a solid five minutes.

The ring was now cleared. Glendon sat in his corner surrounded by his seconds. As usual Stubener was at his back.

Cannam was introduced first, and after he had scraped and ducked his head he was compelled to respond to the cries for a speech. He stammered and halted, but managed to grind out several ideas.

"I'm proud to be here tonight," he said, and found space to capture another thought while the applause was thundering. "I've fought square. I've fought square all my life. Nobody can deny that. And I'm going to do my best tonight."

There were loud cries of "That's right, Tom!" "We know that!" "Good boy, Tom!" "You're the boy to fetch the bacon home!"

(To Be Continued Next Wednesday.)